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## An Early West Pointer

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## AN EARLY WEST POINTER.

BY CHARLES ALDRICH.

CAPTAIN ADAM A. LARRABEE (father of Honorable William Larrabee, of Clermont, Iowa, eighteen years—1868 to 1885—a State Senator, and more recently—1886 to 1890—Governor of the State) graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point, March 1, 1811. In accepting his appointment he wrote to the Secretary of War, General Henry Dearborn, as follows:

WINDHAM, CONN., February 8, 1808.

SIR: I have been honored with an appointment of cadet of artillery attached to the military school at West Point, and in compliance with your request I transmit you my answer as accepting said appointment, at the same time pledging my sacred honor and my life in defense of my country and its liberties. I avail myself of this opportunity of tendering my sincere acknowledgments to His Excellency the President of the United States for the important favor which he has been pleased to confer upon me, at the same time assuring him that when my country calls no exertions shall be too arduous to deter me from fulfilling my duty.

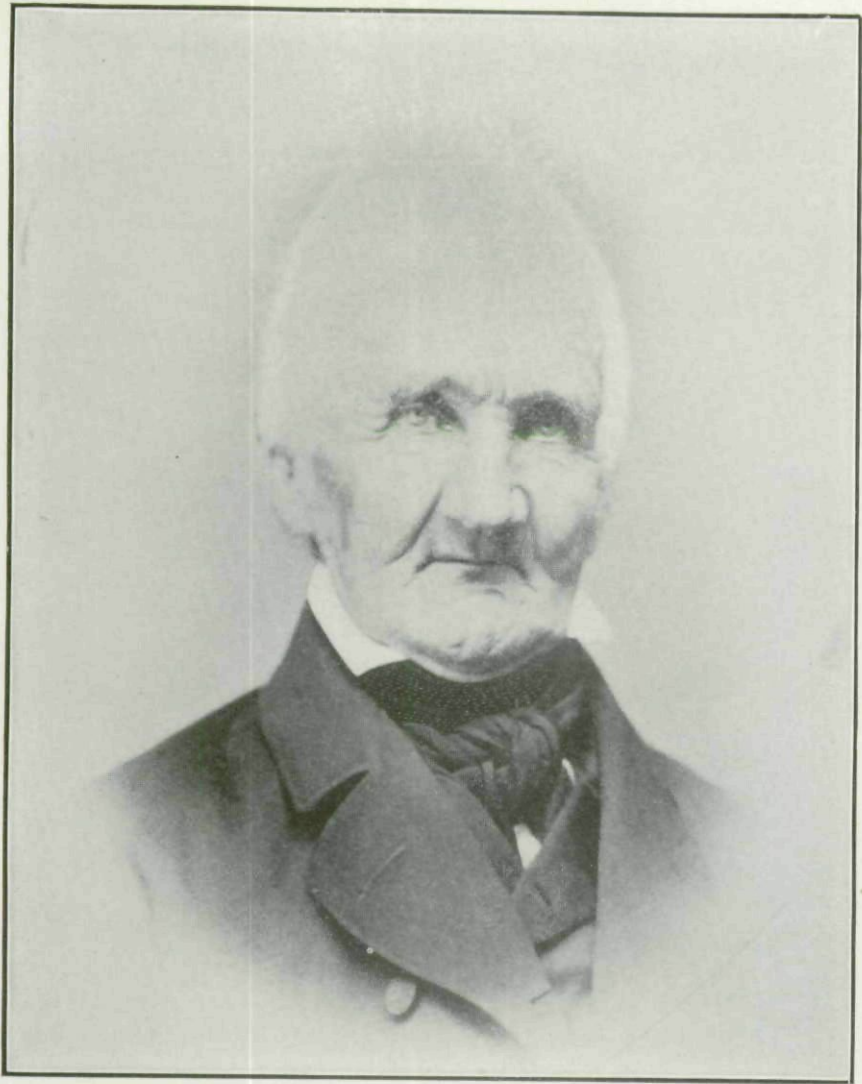
I am, sir, with the most profound respect,

Your obedient and humble servant,

ADAM A. LARRABEE.

HON. HENRY DEARBORN, Secretary of War.

In pursuance of this appointment the young man, then twenty-one years of age, reported at the academy in due season, and remained until his graduation. Upon the completion of his studies he was appointed second lieutenant of light artillery. His promotion to a first lieutenancy followed a couple of months later. His service at that time was in garrisons on the Atlantic coast, though he also participated in the campaign along the northern frontier in 1812. His next service was under General Wilkinson on the St. Lawrence, where he was engaged in the attack on La Colle Mills, March 30, 1814. In this engagement he was shot through the lungs, the bullet lodging against the shoulder-blade, whence it was removed by the surgeon, really passing through the body. He was reported killed, but fortunately recovered from the terrible wound. It was almost a miracle



*your obt. & humble servt*

*Adam A. Larrabee*

CAPTAIN ADAM A. LARRABEE, U. S. A.

A graduate of West Point Military Academy, March 1, 1811. Father of  
Governor William Larrabee.

for the surgeons of those days to save the life of a soldier so badly wounded, though it speaks volumes as to the powerful vitality and fine physical condition of the patient.

In this fight General Wilkinson had attacked some two hundred of the British forces who were strongly posted in the stone mill at La Colle. Two pieces of artillery were brought up and planted within two hundred yards of the mill. General Wilkinson surrounded it, expecting to dislodge and capture the enemy, in which he failed on account of the strength of the walls. Captain McPherson fell, shot through the thigh, and was carried off the field. Lieutenant Larrabee took his place, but was very soon wounded, when the command devolved upon Lieutenant Sheldon. After being thus wounded Lieutenant Larrabee was hauled about twenty miles in an open sleigh to the home of the illustrious Chancellor Reuben H. Walworth, where he was tenderly cared for by the family. It was no doubt due to this excellent nursing that his life was saved. He was soon after promoted to a captaincy, but resigned his commission in 1815.

Captain Larrabee was married to Hannah Gallup Lester in 1817, who bore him nine children, all of whom survived him except John, who died in 1852. In 1828 the subject of this sketch was chosen a member of the board of visitors to the Military Academy. He also served as presidential elector in the great Tippecanoe campaign of 1840.

The business of his civil life was farming rather than politics, and in this way he won very conspicuous success. He was for over fifty years continuously one of the trustees of the old savings bank of Norwich, Connecticut, the deposits in which at the time of his death had increased to almost \$9,000,000. Tradition assures us that he was a most excellent financial manager, an enviable trait which was transmitted to more than one of his sons. He was not only a hard worker, but very frugal and saving in his habits, as one would judge upon seeing his portrait in the Iowa Historical Collections; but to proper objects of charity, and the cause



of religion, he was always a most liberal giver. He was punctual in the discharge of every trust that was committed to him, always present at the meetings of the bank trustees, and taking a thorough interest in all its transactions. The scars which he carried to his grave, as well as the promotions he received, afford abundant evidence that his youthful pledge to the President of the United States, who had appointed him to his cadetship, was faithfully and patriotically carried out.

When peace was declared he had no liking for the monotony of regular army life, but promptly resigned to take his chances in a business career. His systematic training at West Point was visible in all his after years, and his ideas of hard work, economy, business integrity, order, and punctuality were a most precious legacy to his sons, who have abundantly prospered through the same praiseworthy qualities. He was born in Ledyard, Connecticut, March 14, 1787, and died in Windham, Connecticut, October 28, 1869.

In the same compartment of the Iowa Historical (Aldrich) Collections which contains his autograph letter there is one addressed to him, as follows:

NORWICH, CONNECTICUT, 22d July, 1813.

SIR: I have received your letter of the 12th instant. The militia are again ordered to New London, and I hope you will make a good fight if the enemy should attack.

I am, sir, with esteem, your most ob't servant,

JACOB KINGSBURY, Inspector General.

To LT. ADAM LARRABEE, Groton, Connecticut.

Since I prepared the above sketch in 1891, for Mrs. Martha J. Lamb's Magazine of American History (v. 25, pp. 371-74), I have come into possession of a few additional facts relating to Captain A. A. Larrabee, which I will here set down.

He served as railroad commissioner of the state of Connecticut, but I have no data as to the time or length of his service.

According to his friend, Hon. James O. Crosby, of Gar-

navillo, Iowa, he was a model banker. Tuesdays and Fridays were the only days when the finance committee, of which he was a member, met in the bank parlor to consider and decide upon loans. For fifty years Captain Larrabee never failed to be present at these important business meetings, save when he was absent in the west visiting his children. He expressed his belief to Mr. Crosby that the disasters to banks came from their great anxiety to make money too fast. "High rates of interest mean poor security."

After the death of his father he came into possession of the old family homestead, consisting of 100 acres east of the town of Windham. Later on he acquired 500 acres adjoining the old farm—a very handsome estate. All accounts agree that he was a model farmer and business man.

While he was at West Point there was no "class rank." This distinction did not come until 1818. His number in the line of graduates, from the beginning, was 55. That he was a bright and industrious scholar is evidenced by the fact that he was from the first assigned to studies in artillery, the highest branch of the regular service, after the engineers.

The State Historical Department some years ago received from the family of Captain Larrabee, his uniform coat, waistcoat and ivory-hilted sword, which were on his person at the time he was so seriously wounded in battle. These, with others of his personal belongings, including the remnants of his over-coat and the great British bullet which came so near ending his life, are now carefully preserved in the well-known "Larrabee case" in the Iowa Historical Museum.

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THE FOLLOWING are the officers of the State Historical Society, located at Burlington, for the present year: Rev. Wm. Salter, President; David Rorer, Vice President; Dr. Philip Harvey, Corresponding Secretary; A. D. Green, Recording Secretary; W. D. Gilbert, Treasurer; R. M. Green, Librarian.—*The Iowa Citizen (Des Moines)*, Feb. 23, 1858.

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